

Elvis Presley: King of Rock and Roll, and Their Influence on Teenagers

Suran Yoo

University Laboratory High School, Urbana

Teacher: Adele Suslick

In the last year before his death in 1977, over 80,000 fans in Chicago, Illinois, throughout two days watched a man glimmering with sequins and flashy clothes perform his magic. They screamed with delight as the spell that he cast throughout his life to not millions but trillions of teenage fans swept like an epidemic changing their lives forever. He was a mix of white and black culture. He was another mix of wild rebellion, yet still part of that reserved calmness. He was Elvis Aron Presley, the rock legend of all time changing teen life dramatically to what it is today

"Well, since my baby left me, I found a new place to dwell. It's down at the end of lonely street at heartbreak hotel." These powerful lyrics from the song "Heartbreak Hotel" captured the teenage audience starting from April 1956 as it climbed to number one on the *Billboard* top hits as well as did eighteen of his other songs. In Chicago, Illinois, he had number one hits in 1956, 1957, and 1969. Having been raised in a poor environment, Presley was experienced with many types of music including the black music. Blending this type of music in with his white appearance and voice, the attraction of many fans of different race and music taste was deadly.

His music was not the only part that captured the teen audience but also ever present gyrating hips, causing his nickname, "Elvis the Pelvis", and the shaking of his legs. Sending young teen girls screaming on the top of their lungs in ecstasy, these were Presley's signature moves throughout his entire career. With additional "making out

with the microphone" and 'Jumping up and down with their guitar" these moves are still seen in teen rock today including bands that were formed in Chicago, Illinois. Going platinum in the same place, Presley was not one to follow current trends, but instead to set them.

Although his career did not start this way, as a little boy he craved attention but at the same time was extremely shy. In his first concert, Elvis was so nervous yet completely absorbed in the music he danced clumsily. When the girls screamed, he was terrified because he thought that they were laughing at him, but when he found out that was because they loved his moves and music, he defined more of his dance moves, and screams increased in both volume and attracted more girls. However, the reaction from the opposite sex was different, because men and boys did not see that talent at first and thought that the moves were "not planned out." Often on the second time they saw Presley though, things dramatically changed. There were so many screams from the girls that no one could hear what he was saying, and Elvis' moves were definitely less spontaneous. From then on, he was the icon and obsession for all boys and girls, the girls to someday marry him, and the boys to someday be like him. As the days went on in Presley's life, especially before and after he was drafted into the war, it took a toll on his number one celebrity lifestyle.

After the death of his beloved mother right before he was drafted into the army, Elvis was devastated. Although his mom was probably the most important person in his life, she certainly was not the only woman in his life because he also had several girlfriends. He was always accompanied by the most attractive women in the city he was in, along with other adoring fans. He only had a few major women to whom he was com-

pletely devoted, but of course, his music always came first along with his media appearance. Teen girls, who were the main reason for Presley's success, loved him for three things: his irresistible looks, dance moves, and the fact that he was single. This was what every teen girl expected and wanted Presley to be; hence, his manager forced him to be this way. Because of the frequent switches between lovers, he influenced both boys and girls in favor of the idea of more frequent teenage sex and the image of one-night dates and sexuality itself.

The rebel attitude that Presley carried was what he thought was the key attraction to his success. Very few pictures of Elvis during his teens and in his twenties showed a smile on his face. Instead they showed a grim, almost scowling look, which was at that time and even today, appealing and "sexy". These ideas were influenced by Presley's main role model, James Dean, with his movie *Rebel Without a Cause*. When Elvis made his own movies, it also showed the never smiling seriousness before kissing a girl. Not only did Elvis make this effort, the media showed him as an innocent baby-faced boy that looked appealing to the teenage atmosphere at the same time by selecting pictures of Presley that had minimal signs of nervousness and adolescent behavior. As accompaniment to the attitude, he needed hair. Shaped in a ducktail that was fairly long and stuck out, it was a major component of all Elvis impersonators.

During Elvis' lifetime, his music has influenced too many musicians to count. Named the King of Rock, the day that he died, John Lennon exclaimed, "Before Elvis, there was nothing" and so it was for the era of rock and roll music. Beloved fans, including Chicago fans still come to his mansion in Graceland hoping to see glimpses of who he once was and various signatures and scratches of initials are on the front gate.

The last concert that Presley gave was seen by sincere smiles and kisses ending his career with a final phrase in the deep tone he voiced in his microphone. "thank you very much." [From Mike Evans, *Elvis. A Celebration*; Lea Frydman, "Sexy Elvis". [www.elvispresleynews.com/ Article 1 047 .html](http://www.elvispresleynews.com/Article%201047.html). (Oct. 16, 2004); Lea Frydman, *The Genesis of Elvis Music*, [www.elvis Presleynews.com/article 1 076.html](http://www.elvispresleynews.com/article%201076.html). (Oct. 16, 2004); Peter Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis*; Francese Lopez, "On Tour Concerts" [www.elvisconcerts .com/4.htm](http://www.elvisconcerts.com/4.htm). (Oct. 19, 2004); Ann Bobbie Mason. *Elvis Presley*; Elvis Presley, *Heartbreak Hotel lyrics*, [www.lyrics freak. com! e/ elvis-presley /48333 html](http://www.lyricsfreak.com/elvis-presley/48333.html). (Oct. 20, 2004); Ronald P. Smith. "Here are the number one songs this week in Chicago during the 50s 60s and 70s". www.oldiesmusic.com/no1.html. (Oct. 19, 2004).]